

Remarks by Leslie Bassett
Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy
19th Mindanao Business Conference
September 17, 2010, Cagayan de Oro City
Theme: One. Global. Mindanao: Maximizing Potentials.

Sec. Luwalhati Antonino,
Mayor Vicente Emano,
PCCI President Ambassador Francis Chua (Chu-wa),
PCCI Vice President for Mindanao and Conference Chairman Edwin Capili,
Cagayan de Oro City Chamber of Commerce and Industry President J. Rafael Paguio
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Magandang umaga and good morning.

Ambassador Thomas is very sorry he cannot be here today, and sent me to represent him at this timely conference. The future of Mindanao is, to an important degree, reliant on the initiative and commitment of business leaders like all of you who build peace and security one job at a time. In an era of transformation your decisions and investments are a key impetus for positive change. My thanks for allowing me to share with you how we might work together towards building a new Mindanao.

This year's conference theme is "One. Global. Mindanao: Maximizing Potentials" and it nicely summarizes both the challenges and possibilities you will discuss in the hours and days ahead. In an increasingly unified world we cannot let divisions limit us, conflict inhibit us, or doubts prohibit us. We must dream together, learn together, develop together and invest in each other to maximize potential for every single citizen.

I understand that participants from all over Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago are here today. A special hello to all of you, whether you are from the private or public sector: whether you are focused on business or agriculture; whether you are Muslim or Christian; whether you represent an established enterprise or a new venture. This kind of diversity is essential to maximizing potential. It suggests that the united effort of all Mindanao – the "One" Mindanao of your conference's theme - is becoming a powerful force for positive change.

And change is coming, in the Philippines and in the world. Together you are some of the smartest and most creative people in Mindanao. Use this time to generate positive momentum, to set concrete goals, and to ally yourselves to the vision of a Mindanao free of violence, safe for all children, and home to investments that build towards a sustainable, more prosperous tomorrow.

In many areas in Mindanao, you have already made a positive difference. Davao, Zamboanga, General Santos, and, yes, Cagayan de Oro, are now among the leading cities driving growth and expanding economic opportunity in the Philippines. Look around these cities, and you can see new malls, housing developments, and businesses springing up everywhere. From Cotabato City to Isabela City, there are signs of increasing economic activity.

But it's not just the big cities. Real progress is also being made in the smaller communities of Mindanao. New businesses and new jobs are being created daily in places like Koronadal, Kidapawan, and Malaybalay. The sound of a new company opening is like a fresh breeze through the trees. That sound means people have confidence in their future. That sound means people have resources to invest. That sound means people have made a commitment to their community. That is the sound of change coming to Mindanao.

With a new Philippine president, with a strong Philippine economy, and with the commitment of Philippine leaders like yourselves, change is a portent of better times to come. I can promise you that if you take the lead, as I am sure you will, the United States will continue to partner with you on the path to One Global Mindanao, maximizing its potentials.

Look at the opportunities September alone brings. Cagayan de Oro is hosting a trade event right now in the atrium across the way, and 15 American businesses are represented there. These businesses might not have come to the ORO BEST Exhibition five years ago, but today they are here looking to expand markets and find new partners.

Later this month President Aquino will travel to the United States and participate in the U.S.-ASEAN Leaders Forum with President Obama and the leaders of the ASEAN countries. This is currently the only scheduled event where our two leaders are expected to participate together, and signals our shared commitment to regional dialogue. While President Aquino is in New York our two governments will sign the Millennium Challenge Compact, a \$434 million program that supports President Aquino's priority goals of improving governance, developing communities, and building infrastructure. While in New York President Aquino will also meet with investors, and urge them to consider the Philippines. I am optimistic he will persuade them – so I hope Mindanao will be ready.

What have you got to offer? You know better than I – rich agricultural lands, mineral deposits, spectacular natural resources, wonderful people. What are the challenges? You know those too – weak infrastructure, high energy costs, issues of governance, and conflict. For Mindanao to change, to reach its full potential in this competitive global world, you need to work together to help address those issues that still hold Mindanao back. So much progress is already been made that I am sure more can come. We are delighted to work with you to make it happen.

Mindanao is special for us. The bulk of our assistance to the Philippines has been directed to projects in Mindanao for almost two decades, so you can see we are in it for the duration. This year multiple U.S. government agencies will dedicate almost \$100 million to programs in Mindanao designed to promote development, expand education, build new infrastructure, increase agricultural production, support business and provide law enforcement training. We are pleased and proud that we have made, and continue to make, a real difference in peoples' lives. But of course we can't do it alone – we rely on the people of Mindanao.

We value the close partnerships we have with you and the broader business community. Sunpower, Dole, Petron, Rotary, and other business and community groups invite us to work with them, and we gladly do so. These partnerships can literally light up a town, construct a

school, bring safe water to a community and open the doors of a new language to students. Working with cell phone service providers we can extend microcredit programs so next year, at this conference, there will be even more successful business people ready to talk about constructive change.

We value our partnerships with government authorities at all levels. We work with the Mindanao Development Authority, with the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, with the Government of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and with the provincial and municipal governments throughout the islands. These partnerships bring better health to communities; provide prenatal care to new mothers and pediatric support to new babies. They help develop bridges, drill wells, and lay out roadways and airport tarmacs. Finally, our partnerships with the government contribute to security and respect for the law.

We value our partnership with the many colleges, high schools, elementary schools and Parent Teacher Associations with which we work. The future belongs to a generation that is well-educated, computer-literate, adaptable and tolerant. Our partnerships help build that next generation.

We applaud initiatives by the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, or MILF, to renew their efforts to end that conflict. We hope that the parties will be able to resolve their outstanding differences and reach an agreement. But there are many conflicts in Mindanao, and I want to offer a special thanks to all of you who, through your actions and your engagement, defuse confrontation and promote mediation, dialogue and understanding.

This is a time of hope and change for Mindanao and for the entire country. As I said earlier, a new administration has taken office – an administration which appears eager to take on the many problems that have held back the country's potential for years, and which has many good ideas about how to fix them. President Aquino made it clear again yesterday, in Davao, that addressing conflict and poverty in Mindanao is high on his list of priorities.

It is high on our list too, as I know it is high on yours. We would all love to see a day when there are no more displaced families in Mindanao, no more bombs in airports, no more rido and no more warnings against travel in Mindanao. We would love to see a day when the theme of this conference – One. Global.Mindanao: Maximizing Potentials -- has become a success story envied the world over. Working together you have the vision, the power and the commitment to make it happen. If you lead the way, I promise you we will follow.

I wish you all a highly successful Mindanao Business Conference.

Mabuhay tayong lahat (Long live you all)!

Thank you.